The Abrahamic Family House opened to the public on March 1st, 2023. Upon my first visit to Abu Dhabi in January of 2023 I had taken notice of the stone monoliths bearing a cross, a crescent moon, and a menorah. Eventually, I went over to the grounds to investigate. I took a few laps around the structure, determining that it was not yet open to the public. Upon further research it turned out that I could visit on a day that the cruise ship I am working on, the MSC World Europa, was in port. On March 5th, I was able to explore the compound for the first time. After investigating the nearby Louvre Abu Dhabi Museum, the only officially licensed louvre partnership museum, I took a short walk to find the welcome center of the Abrahamic Family House. Upon free admittance I filled out some input of where I am visiting from, performed a quick security check, and was let into the welcome center. The visitor center is a dark, enclosed room with a coffee shop and a few other rest stops.

When you leave the welcome center the sprawling stone compound emerges. An elevated platform holds a garden and connects the 3 religious temples. These temples are places of worship for the three Abrahamic religions; Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. These are also the world’s largest religions. Each building stands on corners of a large triangle. In the center there is a raised garden. It is elevated by a stoney walkway in an inoffensive gray hue. The flowers and trees were still budding, a reminder of the infancy of this new complex and the infancy of humanity. Hopefully as the garden grows and their roots intertwine, the same will be true of people of different faiths. We are still children grasping for some element of the truth about the universe.

The whole compound is minimalist, being made of smooth grey/white stone. A clean slate. This carried with it the feeling of a new start, something fresh to connect three of the worlds faiths. These 3 religions are all built upon this same blank slate., the word of God that the profit Abraham professed. All three continue to grow from interaction with one another.

Despite the minimalism of the 3 places of worship, each being the same dimensions and building material, they all have a unique character. I listened to one employee describe the columns outside of the Catholic church at one corner as a representation of the forest where Jesus went to pray. The structures all have incredibly unique, yet subtle features relating to the religion of which they represent and the history that has built them. The mosque is decorated with rounded, repeating patterns as is so beloved in Islamic art, and the synagogue’s crossing columns, meeting at the top is a beautiful symbol of each persons divine connection with a the higher meaning. The bedrock of these faiths is the story of the prophet Abraham and like Abraham the 3 faiths are leaving what is comfortable (isolation) and creating a new city where people from all around the world can come together.

The guided text throughout is written in Arabic, English, and Hebrew making the cross lingual approach all the more poignant in its diffusion into interfaith conversation. And conversation is certainly happening. Interaction on this scale is a step in the right direction for the prolongation of tolerance and the message of understanding that the Abrahamic Family House represents. This extends to faiths outside of the Abrahamic faiths as well. Recognizing the importance of communication does not apply only to the religions with similar roots.

The Synagogue interior is decorated by a sheer canopy that drapes from the high ceilings. Behind the canopy, the light lets in the shapes and shadows of crossing wooden lattice that goes all the way from the ground to the ceiling. The top has two more triangles, one painted black and the other made of glass. The light poured in from the triangle on top and from all sides to illuminate the synagogue making it by far the brightest interior of the three buildings. Light holds significance in many religions, but for Judaism light is a central metaphor of the faith.

The mosque interior is an open carpeted room meant to give as much space for people to come worship as is possible. Visitors must remove their shoes and place them in neat shelves just outside and there are stations to wash before praying. Upon entry the soft feeling of the carpet gives a feeling of a homecoming. Kicking off your shoes after a long day at work and taking a deep breath. There are round columns that reach up and become one with the ceiling and a small structure where the Imam leads prayer is the only interior decoration. This floor would be elaborately decorated with different prayer mats when Muslims come to pray, although I was not able to observe that upon my visit. The walls were made up of triangles, making up circular shapes from afar, but revealing the smaller geometric patterns from up close.

The Catholic Church welcomes the visitor with a striking dome of wood pillars jutting from the ceiling. This is another display of simple shapes making a beautiful rounded pattern. There is a crucifix, but it is not the typical wood cross with Jesus hanging upon it, rather it was made of a crafted metal and none of the features of Jesus on the cross were distinguishable. This played into the minimalist approach taken, as well as working as a bridge to Christian’s who do not represent Christ on the cross in their practice. There are the typical rows of pews, an area for a choir to stand, and an alter. The alter is made of granite imported from Greece, perhaps an outreach to the Eastern Orthodox faith. It is noticeably different from the rest of the stones in the facility, all which were sourced locally.

All of these shapes and slabs cannot help but remind me of the Platonic solids. Those shapes which Plato believed comprise all of reality in the higher or perfect realm which is outside of typical contemplation and is largely inaccessible to mankind. The Platonic influence on these three faiths is unquestionable in the history and in their encouragement of philosophical inquiry. This is even observed as you return through the visitors center, a brown colored cave from which you emerge into the light.

This visit was an experience in peace and in the sort of interfaith work that I seek to encourage in my life, even if I am not outwardly religious myself. There was, of course, conflict to be found here as is often found in displays of faith. Focusing on that conflict ignores the interactions that pass peacefully every day and make the world a more understanding place.

P.S. These are the personal impressions of the Abrahamic Family House that I gathered based on my knowledge and experience. It not meant as a generalization of any faith or practice. I hold a great deal of respect or all faiths and cultures and see this work as one more voice in a much larger call for understanding and tolerance.